

**BRITISH COLUMBIA**

# Tofino, B.C. a wild west coast getaway

Surfing, hiking, hot springs

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**Chefs prepare meals in the open kitchen of the Spotted Bear, a cozy bistro in Tofino, B.C. LORI KNOWLES PHOTO**

I think of us as yummy mummies. Not because we're spectacularly bodacious, well bred or capable of turning heads. But because most of us are moms who like to eat yummy food when we travel together.

This time our target is Tofino, B.C., a ruggedly handsome spot for active moms and career girls getting away from kids and work -- women who like to hike, surf, stroll, soak, and of course, eat.

We first meet at Vancouver International Airport, a harried group of 30- and 40-something women from all over the U.S. and Canada. We're determined to put kids' and work schedules temporarily out-of-mind for a single, sport-friendly weekend in Tofino.

Located on the ragged western shore of Vancouver Island -- where Canada falls into the Pacific -- we've been told Tofino is a funky little fairyland of trees, rock and sand, with surfing waves the size of Volkswagens, hot springs, whale watching, sumptuous hotels, and food and drink rich in both goodness and flavour.

The captain of our seven-passenger Piper Navajo Chieftain operated by Vancouver's Orca Airways is, naturally, a woman. She tells us we're making history as Orca's first all-female passenger list and we smile at this as we lift off for a 50-minute flight from YVR to Tofino.

The ride is smooth and the view is spectacular, with the Georgia Strait below. Within an hour we are roaring in a rental van toward our oceanside retreat, Cox Bay's Pacific Sands Beach Resort.

Ahh, the Pacific Sands. Hidden within a grove of fragrant, spicy cedars, the hotel lies peacefully sleeping. With floor-to-ceiling windows, feather-filled beds, two-person tubs and views of the shore and waves smashing against massive boulders, my eyes grow heavy as the light grows dim. I crack open a window and sleep to the sound of the surf for an hour or three, feeling my Toronto-stress weep from my weary bones.

Fortified, we head directly for shelter -- aka Shelter Restaurant, a trendy hotspot filled with fireplaces, seafood, candlelight and surfers.

Bar talk is of surfing. Surfing flicks flicker on the walls. Even in the restroom, tiny flat-screens beside each toilet fill us in on the latest surfing news.

We eat belly-warming fish soup filled with oysters, lingcod, mussels and salmon, all washed down with red wine direct from the Okanagan. And we make plans for the next two days to hike, bike and learn about the area's famed coldwater surfing.

I don't draw my curtains that night and early the next misty morning, I awake to a painterly view: A foamy, roiling sea framed by dripping, deep green cedars.

I walk the beach in rubber boots. Breakfast is waiting in a box by my door when I return -- granola, yogurt and muffins made by chef Tim May of Tofino's RedCan Gourmet.

Our first adventure is a whale-watching and hot-springs sojourn with Jamie's Whaling Station and Adventure Centre.

Our guide Marla and her tug-like boat are a flashback to The Beachcombers (1972-1990). Marla is chipper and smart, with a savvy sense for where whales feed along the wild shores of Vancouver Island. We see barking sea lions and hungry whales moments after departure, but the rolling waves send me deep into seasick purgatory. Marla lays on the throttle and has us inside the calmer waters of Clayoquot Sound before things turn nasty.

After about an hour, we dock at Maquinna Marine Provincial Park -- a place so remote only boats and floatplanes can reach it.

The park is home to boiling hot springs that filter out to the sea. A 30-minute walk on a wooden boardwalk through plush forest delivers us to a narrow, rock-infested canyon full of steaming water.

Off come the clothes. We moms and career mavens stumble into a warm soothing spring, position ourselves toward the sea, and dream of heaven.

Dinner that night is at Tofino's Spotted Bear, a cozy candlelit bistro with an open kitchen, two chefs and a server. We eat braised ribs and fish caught that morning.

Day two is my favourite. We have a lesson booked with Tofino's Surf Sister Surf School, which offers all-female and co-ed surfing camps. Our teacher is Surf Sister's founder, Krissy Montgomery, who has a way of teaching surfing to flatwater Torontonians that seems really, really simple.

We suit up head to foot in figure-flattering (not) suits, then loll around on the sand like sea lions, practicing fake paddling, popping up and hanging 10.

Soon Montgomery sets us afloat in the crashing waves, and, well, let's just say I get schooled in surfing. After I trudge across the beach back to Pacific Sands and soothe my muscles in the hot tub.

Would this 40-something mom try surfing again? Absolutely.

Our final day finishes with a mystery adventure courtesy of Tofino's Atleo Air. Owner Jason Bertin's new service offers sightseeing trips to glaciers, private islands and remote coastal locations.

Head's up, guys: All us girls agree an Atleo trip would be a memorable way to propose marriage!

We're dropped onto a rocky Pacific island where Tofino's Wildside Grill sets up camp and cooks us the best B.C. salmon and spotted prawn I've ever tasted.

The day -- and this short trip -- ends with another sound sleep at the edge of the Pacific. I do not dream of work, carpooling and my next looming deadline. Instead I dream of waves, mist and crackling fires.

For this group of yummy mummies, Tofino has been the perfect girlfriend getaway.

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